

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL MARK R. FRENCH, DEPUTY COMMANDER FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING, CPATT, MNSTC-I, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ SUBJECT: IRAQI NATIONAL POLICE TIME: 10:05 A.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY, JULY 30, 2007

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): We're ready to get started when you are, Colonel French.

COL. FRENCH: Hi, Jack. Colonel French. I guess good evening, gentlemen, evening at our end, anyway.

I understand the focus of interest today is the national police. I've been the director of professional development and training here at CPATT for over a year now. And one of the many areas of responsibility and effort that we have has been working with the national police in terms of their training, manning and equipping. I'm not sure how much background you have or in terms of the history and the formation of the national police, but I'll just take a minute and just kind of run through some of the basic major muscle movements that brought us to where we are today with the national police. In March of 2006, the prime minister -- correction, the minister of interior decided to take a number of disparate units and create the national police. At that time, those units -- there was a commando division, a public order division, each consisting of four brigades each, a mechanized -- actually motorized brigade, an emergency response unit, which arguably you could say is a SWAT-type organization of battalion size, and another organization which was -- well, actually just those four were the main ones. Anyway, they were consolidated into an organization with a headquarters and a commander and staff, which is what we know today as the national police.

And since that time they've continued in this configuration with two divisions of four brigades each and in a mechanized brigade, which is equipped with the armored security vehicle -- the four-wheeled armored vehicle, the AFV. And it was a two-battalion brigade. It just recently has added a third battalion, as well.

In any event, last summer, summer of 2006, the then MNF-I commander, General Casey, was not pleased with not only the operational performance but a lot of issues that are somewhat still

lingering today in terms of the quality and the performance of the national police. At that time, General Casey directed a four-phase transformation program being initiated for the national police.

The first phase consisted of technical and headquarters inspections, looking at personnel action, supply, maintenance, et cetera, to find out where they were weak and where they needed improvement. In addition to that, we conducted a number of -- well, actually each battalion in both divisions received a command climate survey, which was a first-time ever initiative for these individuals or for these organizations, both from a process as well as a cultural thing to have subordinates fill out their anonymous questionnaires on their leaders and their peers. And that was very instructive and that was phase one.

Phase two is the phase that we're in now, and that was initially going to be a very short training period in place, which was called rebluing, and where we were going to provide a -- blocks of instruction on democratic policing, basic police skills and human rights in a policing environment. That three or four-day initial concept grew into what is today the monthlong training program that each brigade of the national police will have conducted by October of 2007. It is approximately 75 percent policing skills, policing -- human rights, policing a democracy, and approximately 25 percent tactical skills, tactical skills like patrolling, cordon and search, running a checkpoint, et cetera. And again, that's at the Numaniyah training center. That will -- phase two will conclude around the 10th of October.

Phase three, which is what I think we're here predominantly to talk about today, is the Carabinieri-like training. And that is what we are in the final stages of developing now, and that is expected to start on or about the 15th of October, post-Ramadan. And the first unit to go through will be the QRF, the Quick Reaction Force battalion, which is part of the headquarters, as a proof of principle or pilot unit, if you will. And right now, this training is envisioned to last approximately 90 days, to be a train-the-trainer, leader-focused training program. And -- but I'll come back to more of that in a minute.

And then of course, phase four, which does not have a specific start date, will be the dispersement, if you will, of the national police outside Baghdad. And as you know, almost all of the national police are currently operating in Baghdad right now as part of the Fard al-Qanun or defense of Baghdad security plan. There are some elements in Balad, the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Division, and also in Samarra right now. And there are some other small elements that are out, but predominantly the bulk of the national police are operating in the Baghdad general area right now.

So those are the four phases. The initial inspections and command climate surveys. Phase two is the Numaniyah re-bluing or bluing training that's ongoing now. Phase three is the Carabinieri-like training, which we will commence this fall. And in phase four, with the eventual distribution, if you will, with some elements in the northern part of the country, some in the southern, and some elements remaining in the Baghdad area.

But I think with that, I will do my best to answer your questions.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

DJ Elliott with Fourth Rail, you were first on the line. Why don't you get us started?

Q Good evening, Colonel. On phase three curriculum, are there any specific details? Also, I've noticed that they keeping talking about eight battalions going through this. Last report I saw, there was nine brigades, plus a new brigade forming. Is that a mistake, because they're all 10 of them going through?

COL. FRENCH: Are you talking about the phase three of the Carabinieri-like training?

Q Yup.

COL. FRENCH: Not only it's not a mistake, but it's -- that's a good question. Unlike the phase two training, which we're conducting in Numaniyah, where the entire brigade participates -- and it consists of the phase two at Numaniyah, classroom theory, as well as practical exercises and collective training at the platoon and company and battalion level, as well as a brigade-level exercise at the conclusion of phase two at Numaniyah -- the phase three training, the Carabinieri-like training -- there's a "train the trainer" leader- focused training. The concept is a battalion from each brigade will send its leaders -- officers, NCOs and commissioners, commissioners and warrant officers -- and a selected group of shurta, or policemen, to participate in the training.

At the conclusion of the training, these individuals will go back and join the part of their battalion that did not attend. And the concept -- and this is from the Carabinieri, and I'll talk a little bit about how they proofed this before -- is then the -- each brigade will have an enheightened (sic) -- a heightened skilled organization, and then this becomes the training base for this improved skill set for the rest of that brigade. So it's a leader-centric, "train the trainer" focus, unlike what we're doing now down in Numaniyah.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Andrew Lubin.

Q Yes. Good afternoon. It's Andrew Lubin from ON Point. Sir, I'm not familiar with Carabinieri training. Can you go through this in more detail, please?

COL. FRENCH: Sure.

The Carabinieri are a paramilitary police force that is highly regarded and probably -- without exaggeration, probably the best in the world at what they do. For a long time they were part of the Italian Ministry of Interior, and they were shifted not too long ago over to the Ministry of Defense.

But the Carabinieri -- and again, this is probably a good point to stress the point -- the intent is not to make the national police Carabinieri. The key is to provide them with Carabinieri-like training skills. And the type of things that we're looking at, the curriculum consisting of -- is public order response, enhanced law enforcement skills, investigative skills, taught by the Carabinieri, to include investigations; selected forensics, if you will; some special weapons and tactics training, if you will; operations in urban area.

And the whole idea behind the national police, at least the concept behind, is to provide a bridging force between the patrol and station police, the blue-shirted policemen who are on the street, and the Iraqi army. So if there is disturbance or a crisis in the country of Iraq and it's beyond the scope of the station or the district police to handle, the concept is the national police would be called in to address this crisis. And these skill sets that the Carabinieri are providing are to address that concept and that capacity and that ability.

And again, this bridging force then could be brought in so that a crisis situation or a disturbance or requirement that exceeded the local -- the capacity of the local police would not necessitate calling in the Iraqi army, and the Iraqi army can stay focused on external threats and then the police taking the community and the local police, law enforcement, and then if there is a situation arises that exceeds, again, their ability, the national police would be called in.

Q Would these people then fit in similar to our state police or similar to the FBI?

COL. FRENCH: Well, that a very interesting point. There are agencies within the Ministry of Interior security forces that do investigative tasks like the FBI, but we don't have in the United States a force that would compare to what the national police are evolving to. In Europe, for example, in France and Belgium you have the Gendarmerie, in Italy you have the Carabinieri, and so the current thinking of the Iraqi government is to create a force along those lines, again. And then we have highway patrol here in Iraq. We don't have a state police, like you will -- like you talk about. And interestingly enough, prior to the liberation of 2003 there was a civil security force that was called Emergency Forces that is somewhat similar to where the government is going with the national police today.

Q Okay. If you have an incident -- if you have a militia attack, would a militia attack be an IP, an IA or a national police response, then?

COL. FRENCH: Could be. It would depend on the nature and, I think, the scope of it. And again, if you go back to what the concept behind what the national police are being developed into, if there was a militia event that was an illegal event and that the government of Iraq wanted to use a force or needed a force that had capability beyond the local police -- for example, we had a situation a couple of months ago down in Maysan province where the militia were fighting each other and they had taken over a couple of police stations. And the national police, who are not exactly mobile right now, were directed by the prime minister to go down there and establish law and order and stop the fighting. And they, in fact did that, did go down to this event and participated with the Iraqi army forces.

So that's the kind of thing that's envisioned for them on that end. And again they have a spectrum of employment that runs from assisting local police with -- and that goes to their law enforcement and their investigative skills and forensic skills and in their upper end is almost a paramilitary where they can do cordon and search and go beyond what would be the normal level of what your station and patrol, your cops on the beat if you will, are capable of doing.

Q So we could -- and American comparison would be to a state police force, I would imagine.

COL. FRENCH: Again I'm hesitant to put that label. I'm more familiar with and I think it would certainly be more accurate to put them in the category with the gendarmerie, as I mentioned, in France and Belgium, and again the Carabinieri in Italy. It would be a bit of a stretch in terms of the state police as I understand and I'm familiar with, our state police in the United States.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred Fishman.

Q Yes, sir, good afternoon. Thanks for taking your time.

Could you talk a little bit to the efforts to drive sectarianism out of the different police forces and what's being done to ensure that, either through criminal investigation units or through oversight? And what's your general impression and feeling about the progress that's being made?

COL. FRENCH: Well, I mean, that's obviously a very, very big topic. And the national police have had problems in this area in the past, and that was one of the reasons why then the MNF-I commander, General Casey, in the summer of 2006 initiated this four-phase program of which this phase three, Carabinieri, is part of it. I do know that the current commander, General Hussein al-Wadi (sp), and the minister of Interior, Minister Bolani, have taken concrete steps toward eliminating any sectarian involvement or activity in the national police. In every instance when the national police commander and/or the minister of interior had been presented with facts and evidence, they had taken decisive action. I think this is probably best illustrated by the fact that eight out of the nine brigade commanders within the last year had been relieved and removed, some for involvement with sectarian activity, some for poor performance and in at least one case I can recall one for illegal activity, of which sectarian militia activity would be part of it.

In addition to eight of the nine brigade commanders having been removed in the last year, who have been replaced with individuals who have demonstrated loyalty to the country of Iraq and the constitution, 17 out of the 27 battalion commanders have been removed and again some for militia activity and others for poor performance and illegal activity. So those are two examples that come to the top of my mind on that.

In addition, every unit that goes through the Numaniyah phase two training go through a biometric vetting process and are checked against a ministry of interior interior database for criminal record and/or any history -- known activity with sectarian militia activity.

And we've culled out quite a few. And we range from in the low 20s up into the 50s per brigade of individuals who have previous criminal records, prison sentences. We find guys who are enrolled in the army as well as the national police.

But the point is, that's just another process. And again, I think the most important thing is, when presented with evidence, the track record of the commander of the national police and the minister of interior is they take action.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much.

Did somebody else join us?

Q Yeah, Bruce McQuain with QandO.

MR. HOLT: Yes, Bruce.

Q My question would go back to phase two, where you originally felt that a three- or four-day, I guess, training would be sufficient. What changed your mind, and why is it going longer now?

COL. FRENCH: Well, it wasn't that -- I mean, that was the original thought. And again, given the security environment -- and this is part of the problem with the National Police, is that they are committed, lock, stock and barrel, to security operations in Baghdad. And these guys are on the street 24 hours a day, seven days a week, month in and month out. And it's been very difficult.

And so the original thought was, well, let's give them a quick infusion of three -- (pull by ?) battalion off line and give them some training. Well, when we got into the mission analysis of this and started looking at what exactly they needed and the scope of the problem with their poor performance -- or lack of performance in some cases, poor in others -- it became evident that the phase two tasks and desired end state -- i.e., again, the enhanced professionalism, an understanding of human rights and policing, understanding policing within a democracy, respect for rule of law, et cetera -- couldn't be done in three or four days.

And so we built a program around the entire brigade, again with education, with theory, with training, with practical exercises and collective tasks, because it was a multi-echelon approach for the individual level, the unit level, leader development, et cetera. And so we realized that anything less than that wouldn't yield positive results and put the transformation of the national police on the right path.

Q Okay, thanks.

Q I'm Gerry Gilmore, sir, with American Forces Press Service. It seems to me that -- I mean, could you just say a little bit about how important establishing this core of loyal, efficient national police is to the stability of Iraq, to the future of Iraq, because you're right, it basically seems to me it's being established to deal with internal civil unrest or, as you say, something that the army's more focused on external threats -- more like internal threats, like here we've got the ATF and the FBI. To me, that's what it seems like to me. Is that what's so important about it, you're making a vetted core of loyal professionals that can handle that kind of thing -- insurgent

actions or militia actions -- something that's against the Iraqi federal government because you don't really have that now?

COL. FRENCH: Well, there's a larger issue here as well as the focused one of the national police, and that is the professionalism and the capability in the -- of the Ministry of Interior security forces, of which the national police are a component. And when you look across -- and that's one of the things we deal with here at CPATT is we deal with the Iraqi police services, you know, the traffic, the station, the patrol, as well as special investigative groups within the, I guess, the FBI light to include forensics and, you know, people that do the post-bomb inspections, et cetera; and then also the internal affairs folks for the MOI, but also we deal with the border forces, the Department of Border Enforcement and those -- the training and the professionalism, we deal with those. And across all these Ministry of Interior security forces, there is an issue of professionalism and credibility and quality.

And so, you know, as these forces go, so goes the ability to maintain law and order, and the government of Iraq is committed to the education and training of these forces. And so it's hugely important whatever the role of the national police ends up being, that the force is credible and trusted by the people of Iraq. And they've problems with that in the past; that's why this transformation program was undertaken and is under way, to establish credibility and trust with the Iraqi people. And many of these forces have fought bravely; thousands have died in fighting the insurgents. And so at the same time, as been noted and documented, there are some in these organizations that have participated in militia activity.

So the intent is to bring them up to a level of acceptable professionalism and capability and that they are there to enforce the constitution and the laws of the country of Iraq. And so that's where we come in in assisting the minister of Interior and his police leaders in helping bring that about.

Q How many national police are there now?

COL. FRENCH: How many are there now?

Q Mm-hmm.

COL. FRENCH: That's a good question. There are -- right now there are approximately 30,661 authorized by the Ministry of Interior, and the current assigned strength is about 25,000, a little over 25,000, 25,400. That's the assigned strength. And it varies from brigade to brigade. Some are fairly low. When I say low, probably in the 60 percent. Some are above 100 percent. And there are a number of reasons for that.

And you got to remember, the national police have been operating now in the Baghdad area for the last couple of years, and so their recruiting has also been from the Baghdad area.

Now, present for duty, they have an interesting furlough policy here, so a significant portion are on leave at any given time. But again, their assigned strength is about -- a little over 25,000.

Q Thanks.

COL. FRENCH: Again, most of those are in Baghdad.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. We just got a couple more minutes here left. Any follow-ups right quick?

Q Yeah, I have one. Colonel, Andrew Lubin again, ON Point. Can you give us an instance or two where the national police have been called out, what they've actually done?

COL. FRENCH: Well, again, I cited an earlier example. The long-term vision for them is a force that's got mobility. And one of our initiatives right now is developing a logistics brigade, which would enable them to deploy anywhere in the country to address a crisis or a situation that the minister of Interior or the government of Iraq wants or needs a force of this character and capability.

They aren't really equipped right now to deploy, if you will, outside of Baghdad, because they're tied to their bases, if you will, for logistics support, et cetera. Q When you say in Baghdad or in the Baghdad area, can you give us an instance or two where a company or a platoon has been called out in response to what situation were they used?

COL. FRENCH: Well, that's a very good question, but the key point is they are employed right now. They're not sitting in garrisons waiting to be called out. They are manning checkpoints. They are doing active foot and mounted patrolling in their respective -- they're integrated into the Baghdad security plan with coalition forces and Iraqi forces. So to understand the Baghdad security plan, you've got coalition forces providing security operations on the streets of Baghdad. The national police are wholly committed. There are no reserves. They're all out manning sectors, checkpoints, routes and securing areas in, again, coordination with Iraqi army units and coalition forces.

Q Oh, good. Again, I just didn't understand --

COL. FRENCH: So they are involved in fighting every day.

Q Okay. Oh, great. Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Colonel Mark French, deputy commander, professional development training at the Civilian Police Assistance Transition -- Training Team for Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. Any final comments, sir?

COL. FRENCH: Well, just it's been a pleasure to share this with you. And that there are a lot of folks -- we have a lot of international police advisers as well as coalition military personnel committed to the development, transformation and improvement of the national police and the Ministry of Interior security forces.

And the progress, both in terms operationally as well as training, that the national police have made in the last year is significant. And while there's still a lot to be done, it's, from our perspective, a good-news story. And the leadership of the national police and the MOI are committed to this. And that's probably the key piece.

But anyway, it's been a pleasure, and I wish you all a good day. And I hope it's cooler where you are than it is here.

Q Hey, Colonel French, you're Army, right?

COL. FRENCH: That's correct.

Q Okay. Good.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much, Colonel Mark French, with us today for the Bloggers Roundtable. Q Colonel, thank you for the time.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir. Appreciate your time.

COL. FRENCH: Thank you, Jack.

MR. HOLT: Yep.

COL. FRENCH: Thanks.

END.